



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology The Duty of Constant Communion

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

“All churches are pretty much the same.” How often have you heard, or even said, something along those lines? And there is some truth to that statement. All churches share a belief in God, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the duty to share the Gospel, the duty to make disciples and so forth. In the Apostles Creed we profess belief in the “Holy Catholic Church”, a reference to the universal Church of all Christian believers. However, as another old saying goes, “The Devil is in the details.” For instance, most governments share the purpose of insuring the public good and maintaining order. A number have some form of elections and duties split among Legislative bodies, Executive offices and a Judiciary. Yet, there are great and significant differences between the governments of the United States and that of Great Britain, France, Italy and Russia.

So it is with Christian traditions. There are real differences in belief and theology among the various traditions. There are real differences in theology between United Methodist, Baptist, Church of Christ and so forth. It’s important that you understand something of the Wesleyan Tradition that formed Methodist Theology and Mission. It’s not just academics and meaningless differences. What we believe should be reflected in how we choose to live our lives.

People often speak of getting back to the basics. Over the last few weeks we have been examining basic United Methodists beliefs. This week we focus on a practice that dates from the earliest days of the Church and it’s meaning in our lives. The Lord’s Supper is where we come to understand **Who** we are, **Whose** we are and **What** we are called to do.

I.

We are first and foremost a people of the Cross. The Cross is a reminder that God became human in order to reach into our reality; in order to reach into our lives. We don’t worship the old Roman and Greek Gods on Olympus. These are Gods that are separated from us in nature and Spirit. We worship the one true God who created all that there is and who actually came to live among us, to live and die as a human being, so that we might be forever in relationship with God. We couldn’t go to God, so God came to us. But, we are not

just a people of the Cross. We are also a people of the Table. The primary symbol of our relationship to God and one another is the dinner table. We gather around a dinner table, for a meal hosted by Christ, and ask that we be made one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world.

Understanding Communion can begin with the Gospels. Consider this passage from the Gospel of John:

²⁵ *When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”*
²⁶ *Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”* ²⁷ *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”*...

³⁵ *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

John 6:25-27, 35 NRSV

In this passage, Jesus chides the people for following him looking to fill their bellies. Jesus says, “You’re not looking for me because you think I am from God. You’re looking for the free meal! You are seeking me out because I fed you once and you want to be fed again.” Jesus then tells the people that he himself is the bread of life. Just like the manna that God gave the people in the wilderness, Jesus is the bread from Heaven that brings life to the world.

In a passage from Mark, Jesus tells his disciples that **they** must feed the people.

³⁵ *When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late;”* ³⁶ *send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.”* ³⁷ *But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.”* Mark 6:35-37.

The Disciples are all worked up because there is a huge crowd of hungry people and they are worried that the crowd will get nasty. So Jesus tells the Disciples, “You give them something to eat.”

Those two ideas express our theology of communion as well as our belief about the meaning of communion. God gave us Christ as the bread that we need to live. And we are called to feed that bread not just to ourselves, but to the world.

II.

Still, it’s one thing to say that Communion is central to our faith. It’s another to really believe that. Too often Protestants, who tended to reject all practices of the Roman Catholic Church, pushed away from the Table of Christ. Sort of like saying, “thanks anyway God, but we don’t want to pig out. We’ll just take communion every now and then.” This is not a new phenomenon. John Wesley preached his sermon on the Duty of Constant Communion 250 years ago.

John Wesley called the Methodists back to the Table of the Lord. Many of them had almost stopped celebrating the Lord’s Supper except for once or twice a year. They had a lot of good excuses for this. The Church of England told its members that they should take communion at least 3 times a year. Most members took that as all that was required.

Others said, “But I am unworthy to take communion. I shouldn’t take communion unless I’m truly worthy of this gift of Grace.” Still others said, “Taking Communion too often would cheapen the sacrament for

me. It would no longer be special.” And there were still other excuses. But Wesley understood that celebration of The Lord’s Supper was central to who we are as a Church; central to who we are as the Body of Christ. And so he set out to speak to these objections.

III.

Why celebrate communion as often as possible? Wesley began with Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Here we have the earliest reference to the institution of the Lord’s Supper:

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. NRSV

Just looking at this passage from 1 Corinthians, what is the best reason for celebrating the Lord’s Supper every time we come together? What reason stands out above all others? **Christ said to do it.** This is virtually his last command to the Church before he is crucified. Christ says to do it.

How often does Christ tell us to do this? He doesn’t limit it. In the early Church the Lord’s Supper was celebrated as a meal and it was the tradition to celebrate it whenever the Disciples ate together. This tradition carried into what became the Roman Catholic Church and the Lord’s Supper was celebrated at every worship service. That is still the tradition in many Protestant and Catholic churches today.

Christ says to do it. God says to do it. Which one of us is qualified to say it is best only every now and then? We celebrate the Sacrament because Christ told us to celebrate the sacrament.

IV.

Some people say that they are unworthy to take communion. Have you ever felt unworthy to take the sacrament? You know what? Go with those feelings. **You are unworthy. We all are unworthy** to receive the grace of God. What else is new? “Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God’s love for us.” (See Romans 5.8) If we are going to wait to be worthy to receive God’s grace we have a long wait coming. And, you know, when we feel the most unworthy is when we are probably most in need of the sacrament.

Well what of the words of Paul that says you shouldn’t take the sacrament in an unworthy manner? I’ve talked about this before but the answer bears repeating. When he wrote those words Paul was addressing a specific problem in the church at Corinth. The congregation didn’t share the meal together. Some members, principally the richest, got there early and ate all the food. Other members, especially poor members or slaves who had to work hard all day long, arrived late to find all the food eaten. In Paul’s opinion **that** was taking the Lord’s Supper unworthily.

We are all unworthy to receive the Lord’s Supper. If we wait to be worthy, we will never celebrate communion.

V.

Some people feel that celebrating the sacrament every week would make it seem routine and would make it so it was no longer special and would make them lose reverence for the sacrament.

Wesley had an answer for this objection too. In so many words Wesley said, “That sounds like a personal problem to me.” Go back to the starting place. Jesus didn’t say a thing about our opinions or our “feelings.” Jesus said, “Do this.” Doesn’t that make it special enough to do? And, even if you find it a grind, isn’t it enough to do what Christ asked of us during his last hours on Earth?

Sharing the Lord’s Supper isn’t about what we like or don’t like. It’s about what we need. We need that Grace that comes through the sacrament. That healing that comes through the sacrament. God giving us comfort, drying our tears and strengthening us for ministry in the world. When we deny our need for that Grace, we are in effect, denying that we need God in our lives. Communion is special because it comes from God. Communion has meaning because it comes from God. Celebrating communion whenever possible can’t possibly remove that meaning from the sacrament.

The title of Wesley’s sermon was, “The Duty of Constant Communion.” Wesley believed that we should celebrate the sacrament of communion every chance we got. We celebrate communion because Christ told us to do so; “Do this in remembrance of me.” We celebrate communion because we need the grace that God offers in communion. We need the healing, the comfort. We need God to dry away our tears. We celebrate communion because, through the table, God makes us one: One with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world.

Wesley’s Advice on Voting

The English Parliamentary election in the Fall of 1773 was one of the most significant in British history. Among the candidates was the eminent Edmund Burke who was running in his first election and who would become one of the most famous legislators in British history. Another of the candidates was an American born Englishman named Henry Cruger. Among the issues being debated was how best to deal with the unrest in the American Colonies. Wesley told his Methodists to approach the exercise of their sovereign franchise thoughtfully and without rancor.

Thur. October 6, 1773.—I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them (1) to vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy; (2) to speak no evil of the person they voted against; and (3) to take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side.¹

Although not explicitly biblical advice, Wesley is speaking about how Christians should approach any duty and how they should deal with those with whom they disagree. It is advice that we should take seriously today, especially point (3).

¹ Wesley, J. (1909–1916). *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*. (N. Curnock, Ed.) (Vol. 6, p. 40). London: Robert Culley; Charles H. Kelly.

THURSDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have concluded our study of Mark and Matthew and have begun a study of Luke.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Mac McAfee	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood		Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

February 21st: A Desolate House: We have all seen them. Houses being sold by banks or houses abandoned and no longer in use. But what of the ones that are desolate but seem to be occupied? My texts are Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18 and Luke 13:31–35.

February 28th: Mad Men, Falling Towers and Fig Trees: My wife is fond of telling me that I should snap my fingers when I change the topic of conversation unexpectedly. If you are prone to do sudden changes in topic take heart: Jesus did it all the time. My texts are Isaiah 55:1–9 and Luke 13:1–9.

Worship Leader's Schedule

February 21

Hal Newman, **Liturgist**

Stacy & Jan Bell, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

February 28

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Jan & Stacy Bell, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

Announcements

Upcoming activities for the children's ministry:

Easter Egg Hunt

This year's event will take place Saturday, March 26 at 10:00 AM. We'll have a few activities indoors as the children are gathering prior to releasing them to the hunt.

Needs: 1. Individually wrapped candies with which to stuff the eggs. (No chocolate please).
2. A bounce house.

Want to help?

1. Join the fun Sunday, March 20 after church for fellowship and to stuff the eggs.
2. Come on Easter Egg Hunt day at 8:30 AM to do a little decorating and a little egg hiding.
3. Invite your friends, neighbors, relatives to join us for this great day.

Vacation Bible School

Needs: A volunteer to head up this year's VBS. There are benefits for being the leader including choosing the date and the theme. Not to worry, you won't be alone. Many of our members look forward to helping with this event as well.

Children's Ministries

Our church is in a period of discernment with respect to our children's ministries. The Nelsons gave us such a fantastic gift in honor of our beloved Nanette. Please continue to pray for us as we determine how best to use it in her honor and to continue Trinity's legacy of "Living as, and leading others to become, Disciples of Jesus Christ."

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** is studying, "**Jesus: Understanding His Death and Resurrection.**" This is a study of Mark 14-16 which we will continue for six weeks. This study was created by Kay and David Arthur who are well known for founding "Precept Ministries." Please consider being a part of this inspiring and interesting study. We enjoy fellowship as well as our Study. All are welcome to join us in Sunday School. Our fellowship begins at 9:45. The study begins at 10:00 AM.

Birthdays in February

Donnie Hartsock, Joyce Edwards, Bert Winton, Maurice Edwards, Jeanne Rybolt, Patricia Stevens,
Rodger Klein, Eric Crowell

Happy Birthday to each of you!